

ganze Werk durchwaltenden Ornamentik, die eben ein typisches Stilmerkmal auch schon vor „Pelléas et Mélisande“ war. Während Formierungstypen aufgrund von Deduktions- und Assoziationsvorgängen vor 1902 nicht auftreten, sind sie schwach in „La Mer“ nachweisbar, sie sind Konstruktionsprinzip in den „Images“ für Orchester und dringen 1904-13 als tragendes Prinzip in das früher nur anderen Gesetzmäßigkeiten unterworfenen Liedwerk ein. Erst die drei letzten Sonaten greifen wieder auf verfestigte Formtypen zurück, ohne daß damit schematische Symmetrien und strenge Wiederkehr verbunden sind; vielmehr disponiert Debussy in analogen Werkteilen sehr freizügig mit analogem motivischen Material, in dem überall bausteinartig durch die ganze Komposition angewandte Intervallstrukturen zu finden sind. Dennoch bezeichnet „Jeux“ den weitesten Vorstoß Debussys bei der Lösung von traditionellen Formgesetzmäßigkeiten, da sich in keinem Werk die Deduktionen so weit von ihrem Ursprung entfernen und nirgends die wechselseitige Annäherung der Motive so weit vorgetrieben wird wie hier.

#### Anmerkungen

- 1 Die Reihe 5, 1959, 5-22.
- 2 Ebenda, 12: „... ein Kreislauf, der immer am Ziel und deshalb ohne Ziel ist, ohne thematische Gestaltbildung, ohne motivische Arbeit“.
- 3 Der für diesen Vorgang auch verwandte Terminus Gestaltvariation (H. Chr. Wolff, „Melodische Urform und Gestaltvariation bei Debussy“, Dt. Jb. d. Musikwissenschaft 11, 1966, 95-106) wird wegen seiner begrifflichen Unschärfe vermieden. Die von Wolff u. a. angeführten Bsp. aus dem Streichquartett können nicht für einen Formierungstyp aufgrund reiner Deduktionstätigkeit in Anspruch genommen werden.
- 4 Im Gegensatz zu Eimert, a. a. O., 8: „Die Wiederholungen“ - gemeint sind nur die einmaligen direkten Motivwiederholungen - „bürgen im herkömmlichen Sinne für Verständlichkeit, aber die Unverständlichkeit wächst in dem Maße, in dem immer Neues wiederholt wird!“

Don Harran

#### CYCLICAL PROCESSES IN BEETHOVEN'S EARLY QUARTETS

The poet Wordsworth wrote of a "dark inscrutable workmanship that reconciles discordant elements, [and] makes them cling together in one society"<sup>1</sup>. In the following discussion the aim is to uncover something of this workmanship in the early quartets of Beethoven. As it deals with things that are often held to be "dark" and "inscrutable", we had best define our terminology at the outset, lest we be guilty of "obscurum per obscurius". The expression "cyclical processes" attaches, obviously, to the question of "form". By "form" we mean both the "formation" of music as a compositional process and the structure the music reveals once this process is completed. By "cyclical", a term variously elucidated in musical writings<sup>2</sup>, we have in mind something along the lines of what the original Greek "kyklos" meant, viz., a circle or a body that proceeds in circular motion. When we speak about "cyclical form" in the early quartets of Beethoven, we mean, then, that these are compositions whose materials are so disposed that they revolve about a central axis<sup>3</sup>. Such "discordant elements" as different themes or different movements may be accorded as parts of a cyclical whole whose central axis, as we shall see, is a theme.



Why the "early" quartets of Beethoven? Ever since Nottebohm pointed out the use of the same pitch sequence in Op. 132 and the "Große Fuge", the thematic connections between three of the last quartets have been exposed and expounded in detail. Indeed, the idea of a "cycle" of quartets has so taken root as to be reiterated in every textbook description of the late oeuvre. Deryck Cooke even went so far in his tracing of cyclical processes as to reduce all five of the last quartets to two basic pitch patterns<sup>4</sup>. The cyclical organization of these pieces, along with the sundry formal oddities of the late works at large, have been brought forth time and again as evidence that the composer, towards the end of his life, was evolving new, radical concepts of musical order. Indeed, there is a tendency to treat the music of this period as removed in form and spirit from the main repertory and, where cyclical processes are concerned, to overlook their existence in works predating the 'twenties. Joseph Kerman says about the gradual tightening of relationships between movements that "his earlier music is not the place to study this tendency"<sup>5</sup>. Fritz Cassirer began his schematic analyses with the "Eroica" and, among the quartets, with Op. 95<sup>6</sup>; he writes that only after feeling his way for some twenty years did Beethoven hit upon the principle of thematic "metamorphosis"<sup>7</sup>. Even Rudolph Reti, who admits to the existence of a cyclical "modus operandi" in Mozart and later Haydn, draws most of his examples of Beethoven from the composer's middle and later years<sup>8</sup>. If we have chosen to limit our discussion here to an early opus, the reasons are as follows:

1. Specific instances of cyclical formation can, and should, be singled out in first period works. In the First Piano Sonata (Op. 2, No. 1), for one, movements I and IV interlock as shown:

Mvt. I

Mvt. IV

8va.....

In the First Symphony, for another, all movements draw from a common fund of materials:

Mvt. I

Mvt. II





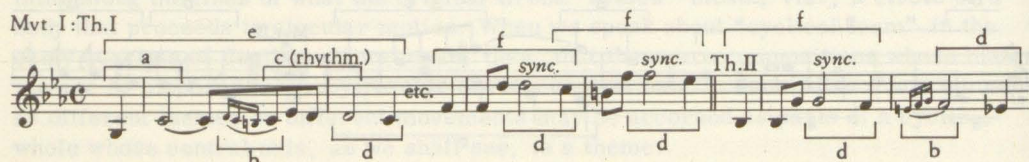
These are two examples out of many.

2. As is well known, Beethoven recorded the initial stages of composition in the sketchbooks. There he not only jotted down ideas that occurred to him, but actually worked out many of the problems attendant upon their elaboration<sup>9</sup>. Fortunately, sketchbooks remain for four of the early quartets, and with their numerous emendations, additions, and deletions, it is clear that Beethoven expended on these the same labor, the same "structural thinking" as on the later quartets.

3. A pronounced example of cyclical formation in the early period may be pointed to in the Op. 18 series itself. It is the Second Quartet in G, and its cyclical propensities have been signalled by any number of commentators, though as a kind of curiosity. Even as discriminate a critic as Kerman writes that "not until the Quartet in C<sup>♯</sup> minor of 1826 will Beethoven draw so lucid an analogy between a final theme and a theme from the first movement"<sup>10</sup>. (What do Op. 2, No. 1 and the First Symphony lack in lucidity?) Given this precedent it is only natural to ask whether the early quartets contain still further evidence of a cyclical ordering of materials<sup>11</sup>.

Let us dwell, for a moment, on Op. 18, No. 2. It exhibits two varieties of cyclical processes: (1) those that work to establish thematic relationships within a single movement, and (2) those that do the same between movements. Regarding the first, Op. 18, No. 2 testifies to what extent the composer has limited himself to a minimum of thematic material, using this material not only as a link between first, second, and closing themes but also as the basis for generating whole sections. By turning different ideas about a thematic axis, the composer is purposely playing down contrasts between themes in favor of contrasts between different projections of the same theme; by building up whole sections from the elaboration of this theme, the composer is moving developmental technique out of the development section proper to let it pervade the fabric of movements in their entirety.

Beyond Op. 18, No. 2 the tightening-up of content thematically and developmentally may be illustrated by Op. 18, No. 4, thought by Riemann to be an older quartet or, if not that, at least based on older material<sup>12</sup>. There, in the first movement, Theme II relates to Theme I by such traits as syncopations on the second beat, appoggiatura cadences, a persistent eighth-note accompaniment, the general rising-falling contour of phrases, and the three-note ornaments (see first stave below):





Bridge

Closing Th.

Mvt. II

Mvt. III

Mvt. IV

Between these themes mediates the bridge: it works out characteristic melodic figures of Theme I (the G C E-flat C skeleton, now inverted to A-flat E-flat C E-flat; the fourths; the ornaments; and the feminine cadences). (See Bridge.) The closing theme connects with Themes I and II through its syncopations and its ubiquitous rhythms (see above).

The same processes of melodic transformation govern Op. 18, No. 6. In the first movement Theme I shares with the sections that follow its triadic figuration (especially the emphasis on the upward sixth), its accompanimental ideas (the percussive repeats of single or alternate notes in the Viola, the bustling eighth-note movement in Vn. II), its grace notes and ornamental turns, and its underlying rhythmic pattern :



Mvt. I: Th. I

c (basic  $\frac{1}{4}$  note rhythm)

a b Bridge a d c c

Th. II

b c Closing Th. c a a b

Mvt. II

d d a a a

Mvt. IV ("La Malinconia")

b ("auskomponiert") a b b etc. d a a a a

[Allegretto quasi Allegro]

a a a a b b

To illustrate the second variety of cyclical processes, those that work to establish thematic relationships between movements, we may allude to the same quartets (Nos. 4 and 6). (See examples above.) The enthusiasm for drawing together separate movements on common thematic ground reached no higher peak than in Op. 18, No. 6: there in the section entitled "La Malinconia" the unassuming sixteenth-note groups of the first movement are condensed into the ornaments that are sounded, with an almost frightening build-up in intensity, on successive degrees of the scale; once the section is completed, these same ornaments expand back to form the twisting-turning figuration of the last movement<sup>13</sup>. As if to emphasize the thematic propinquity of two movements which, on the face of it, seem unrelatable, Beethoven interrupts the Finale twice to juxtapose fragments of "La Malinconia". The contrast is extreme, but Beethoven has seen to it that, as the French adage goes, "les extrêmes se touchent".

What importance are we to attach to these examples of cyclical ordering in the early quartets<sup>14</sup>? First of all, they suggest a more unified picture of Beethoven's stylistic development from earlier to later works than is generally drawn. Secondly, they offer increased understanding of the structural processes at work in his composition. He was ever intent on organizing his materials in as logical and meaningful an arrangement as possible; the sketchbooks and autographs are the graphic proof. Thirdly, they explain the predilection for contrapuntal procedures and variation forms which the composer evidenced from the very outset of his career; like thematic transformation,



these are means to the end of achieving structural coherence. Finally, they reveal the composer as striving to impress unity on diversity ("e pluribus unum"). His reconciling of "discordant elements" by forcing them to comply with cyclical processes of order is, to refer back to Wordsworth, what makes them "cling together in one society". By submitting these processes to detailed analysis we penetrate still further the secrets of that "dark inscrutable workmanship" that went into the formation of his music.

#### Footnotes

- 1 "The Prelude", Bk. I, 11. 341-344.
- 2 Its definition runs the gamut from works built from an ordered succession of movements ("sonata", "suite", "concerto", etc.) to those restating the themes of one movement in another (the Fifth, the Ninth, Op. 101, etc.).
- 3 Such a conception of the cycle derives from the important studies in thematic analysis carried out by Rudolph Reti (e.g., "The Thematic Process in Music", New York 1951). The novel ideas he put forth have been pursued further by Hans Keller, Deryck Cooke ("The Language of Music", London 1959), and, recently, Karl H. Wörner ("Das Zeitalter der thematischen Prozesse in der Geschichte der Musik", Regensburg 1969). The designation "cyclical form", however, is my own, the others speaking instead about "thematic unity" or the like.
- 4 "The Unity of Beethoven's Last Quartets", MR 24, 1963, 30-49.
- 5 J. Kerman, "The Beethoven Quartets", New York 1966, 20.
- 6 "Beethoven und die Gestalt (Ein Kommentar)", Stuttgart 1925.
- 7 Ibid., x.
- 8 Op. cit. (lengthy analyses of the Ninth and Op. 135); "Thematic Patterns in Sonatas of Beethoven", London 1967 ("Appassionata", "Kreutzer", "Waldstein" sonatas, etc.).
- 9 On the various functions served by Beethoven's sketches, see L. Lookwood, "On Beethoven's Sketches and Autographs: Some Problems of Definition and Interpretation", AML 42, 1970, 32-47.
- 10 Op. cit., 49.
- 11 The designation of these quartets as "early" must not be taken too literally. Actually, Op. 18 is the culmination of a long series of experiments, some twenty-two in all, in chamber music writing (from 1785 on). It ought rightly be understood as belonging to a "mature" phase of Beethoven's first period.
- 12 About the dating of this work (with a summary of Riemann's arguments), see Kerman, op. cit., 65-71.
- 13 Note further how the triadic idea of the first movement turns into the B-flat D F progression of "La Malinconia" (opening), into the plaintive rising sixths of its "fugato" (mm. 20-28), and into the skeletal contour of the theme of the last movement.
- 14 Had space allowed, further examples might have been cited from Op. 18, Nos. 1, 3 and 5 as well.